(b) The report recounts certain alleged acts of violence against members of the Christian community in India and seeks to draw its own inferences on the causes of these incidents.

(c) The international community is well aware of India's abiding commitment to secularism and the constitutional and legal safeguards that exist in this regard. Government has conveyed in its bilateral discussions with other countries, the correct perspective on the nature of these incidents and the active investigation being carried out to bring their perpetrators to justice.

(d) The article has attributed these remarks to the Home Minister without substantiating the basis for such attribution.

Agreement to tackle ISI activities by India and Nepal

1319. SHRI ABANI ROY:
SHRI RAVI SHANKER PRASAD:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India and Nepal have recently agreed to tackle ISI activities in an effective manner;

(b) if so, the details of agreement held between both the countries; and

(c) how both countries will help each other to tackle ISI activities?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) to (c) The Government of India have discussed from time to time with the Government of Nepal our concerns about the ISI misusing the Nepalese territory and the open India-Nepal border for activities inimical to India's interest. Reports received by the Government indicate increasing evidence of ISI using Nepal as a staging post for terrorist activities directed against India and the Nepalese Government have been sensitised on this issue.

Measures have been taken to enhance cooperation with Nepal, particularly with regard to implementing effective border management. The concerned agencies of the two Governments remain in regular touch to coordinate efforts to tackle this problem. There are also bilateral institutional mechanisms, such as the Joint Working Group on Border Management and Home Secretary level talks, which have been evolved to specifically develop cooperation on security matters and to address these concerns. In pursuance of the decisions taken in these meetings, both sides have agreed to jointly coordinate measures, including stepping up vigil along the contiguous border

districts of India and Nepal, to prevent misuse of the open India-Nepal border for activities directed against India. On their part, the Government of Nepal have assured that their territory would not be used for activities inimical to India's interest and have been extending their cooperation to the Government of India in this regard.

Russian pressure on the release of accused in the Purulia Arms drop case

1320. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY:
SHRI SWARAJ KAUSHAL:
SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that during his visit to Russia in June, 2000, he has committed to the Russian Government that India would review the cases of four Russian pilots lodged in Calcutta jail convicted in the Purulia arms drop case;

(b) if so, what were the compelling reasons for giving this commitment to review the cases of those who were sentenced to life imprisonment by judicial authority; and

(c) the final decision of law in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) to (c) The Russian leadership had at various levels raised the issue of pardon/clemency for the pilots. The family members of the crew had appealed for mercy. The State Duma of the Russian Federation (Lower House of the Russian Parliament) had adopted a Statement on February 9, 2000 seeking mercy to allow the convicted pilots to return home. The Government of India maintained that this case would be decided and a lasting solution found within the four corners of Indian law.

Taking into consideration the strength of Indo-Russian relations, which are time tested and are being consolidated into a strategic partnership, as also the humanitarian dimensions of the problem, and after careful consideration and in pursuance of powers conferred under Article 72 of the Constitution of India, the President of India was pleased to remit, with immediate effect, the unexpired sentence of imprisonment of the five Russian pilots.

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